

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL AND CHAIR HILDA L. SOLIS

May 31, 2016

For children who are removed from their homes in order to protect them from abuse or neglect, and probation youth detained in juvenile hall and at risk of entering foster care, consideration of placement with relatives or non-related extended family members (NREFMs) is not only consistent with current law, but also good and humane policy. Kinship or NREFM placements carry a great number of benefits, including continuity of family ties, knowledge and identification; consistency of cultural, ethnic and religious values; and a continuous connection to community. As a result, children living with relatives have been shown to have better educational, health and behavioral outcomes than those in traditional foster care or group homes.¹ They also experience greater placement stability and move more quickly toward all forms of permanency.

Last year, the Board unanimously approved two motions to provide more financial resources and support to relative caregivers. In June 2015, Los Angeles County put an end to the long-time financial disparity between relative caregivers eligible for federal assistance and those who are not. Kinship caregivers are now eligible to receive payment equal to the basic foster care rate under the Approved

¹ Sakai, Christina MD, Hua Lin, PhD, and Glenn Flores, MD, *Health Outcomes and Family Services in Kinship Care: Analysis of a National Sample of Children in the Child Welfare System*. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine 165 (No.2) (2011): 159-165. www.archpediatrics.com

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Relative Caregiver (ARC) program. On a motion by Supervisors Kuehl and Ridley-Thomas, DCFS also recently released a Request for Information to partner with community based organizations in providing services and support under the new Relative Support Services (RSS) program.

With the State's Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) slated to begin in January of 2017, the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Probation, and Mental Health (DMH) are working together to prepare for implementation. CCR represents a major shift in the way we approach child welfare. Under the requirement of ensuring that the first placement is the best placement, we will have to reduce our reliance on group homes and, thus, increase our reliance on resource families, including relative and NREFM caregivers.

Of the roughly 18,000 children in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County, about 53 percent are placed in the homes of their relatives. This rate exceeds the national rate of 29 percent and 40 percent for the State (including Los Angeles County), due in large part to the success of the Permanency Partners Program, also known as P3, the Probation/DCFS Permanency Collaboration, and Probation Child Welfare's Permanency and Family Finding. Launched in 2004, P3 initially focused on placements for older foster youth with dwindling prospects for finding a "forever" home. To further improve permanency outcomes, P3 was expanded in 2011 to include upfront family finding for newly detained children.

Of course, there is always room for improvement. Specifically, while several DCFS Regional Offices and all Probation Child Welfare Offices have developed upfront family finding systems utilizing technology to identify family members, there is no consistent process countywide. Search efforts may be conducted by different staff using

different methodologies at different points during the life of a case. The lack of a consistent protocol can result in placement disruption and trauma after bonding has occurred; delays in adoption finalization; and family strife when a child is placed outside the family due to delays in family finding.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation, in collaboration with the Office of Child Protection and the Courts, to report back in 120 days on ways to accomplish the following goals:

1. Develop a plan to increase relative placements and the overall role of relatives and NREFMs in the lives of children in foster care.
2. Establish an Upfront Family Finding program based on current State and federal law, and a review of models and best practices in other jurisdictions, as well as those in DCFS and Probation Child Welfare Regional Offices. The review shall consider programs that include partnering with community based organizations, as is done, for example, in Alleghany County, Pennsylvania.
3. Develop a single countywide protocol for the Upfront Family Finding program to be coordinated with the existing P3 program and Probation Child Welfare's Permanency and Family Finding, and a timeline and estimated budget for program implementation, training and policy development.